

IT HAPPENED in a NIGHT — By Edgar Wallace

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JORDAN YEOMAN is a gentleman farmer with three daughters. Josephine is the business head of the family, and calls her father by his first name. She has this weakness: that she believes a day will dawn when there will walk into her ken a greatly desired criminal for whose arrest a fabulous reward is offered. Georgina aspires to be a playwright and the members of the family assist her in rehearsing her plays. Helen is a very prim and punctilious little girl of fifteen, just out of school. The Yeomans have rented one of their spare rooms to a Summer boarder named Jones, who is expected to arrive in a few days. Cicero Jones, known as "The Tremendous Jones" in the theatrical world, is a reader for managers. His opinion of the availability of plays is considered infallible. Before he leaves on his Summer vacation a manager gives him two of Georgina's plays to read while he is away. He does not know that the author is a member of the family with whom he is going to spend his vacation. Josephine is reading in a local paper that there has been a big bank robbery and the burglar is headed in their direction when Georgina calls a rehearsal of one of her plays.

(Continued from Last Sunday) CHAPTER V.

TO a man with predilections toward a smooth-running life, it was something of a handicap and an inquietude to be related to stage-struck women. Not that either was stage-struck in the accepted sense of the word. Georgie wrote plays; to Jordan they were good, but then, he knew nothing about plays or authors.

But of all the drawback which this play-writing business presented none equalled in point of inconvenience, amounting sometimes to a positive misery, this detestable practice of roping him in to read a part in one of Georgie's rehearsals.

"Must I rehearse? These hasty meals are going to play the devil with my digestion," he complained but none the less obeyed.

"Help push the table over in the corner, Jordan," said his energetic daughter. "Exercise is what you want."

Mrs. Mumble, an interested spectator of the moving scene, waited.

"Will you be wanting me, miss?" she asked.

Georgina consulted her scrip.

"Let me see, what were you?"

"I was the young lady that led the young gentleman into temptation," said Mrs. Mumble hopefully.

Georgina shook her head.

"That was the farce—no, this is the drama, 'The Wanderer,' Mrs. Mumble—there isn't a part for you."

A disgruntled actress went back to the kitchen and the peeling of potatoes.

A clear space was now made. Josephine, trained in dining-room stage craft, had rearranged the furniture to meet the requirements of the scene, and now turned her attention to Jordan. That worthy man had stealthily pulled his chair to the fireplace and had unobtrusively disappeared from view.

"Jordan!" called Josephine sharply.

There was no answer.

"Jordan! Damn the boy, he's gone to sleep again!"

"Oh!" a horrified gasp from Helen.

"Well?" Josephine snapped, "it is a classical quotation—from Dickens."

"To one's own father!" said the shocked Helen.

"To three's own father, if you don't mind," said Josephine. "You're not the only child. Jordan!"

Jordan woke with a start.

"What do I do?" he complained.

"You can sit where you are," said Josephine. "You're Sir Milford Scarborough."

"Oh," said Jordan blankly.

Georgina rumped his hair.

"You haven't got much to say, so don't grouch, darling," she coaxed and Jordan growled again.

"I'm not grousing. But why am I always the villain?"

"All Georgina's male characters are villains," explained Helen.

"Even the clergymen. I'm not saying they aren't true to life. Clergymen can be as bad as anybody, but—"

"I wish you'd keep the Sunday papers out of that child's hands, Georgie," said Josephine in despair.

"Now, is everybody ready?"

Everybody was ready. Mr. Yeoman, with his script on his knee, nodded heavily.

"Go ahead, Georgie."

Georgina had retired to the vicinity of the stairs. Now she stalked tragically toward the dozing Jordan.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked in hollow tones. Apparently Jordan hadn't.

"Go on, Jordan!" encouraged Josephine anxiously.

Jordan blinked.

"Eh—er—what?"

"Have you nothing to say to me?" repeated Georgina, and her father fumbled with the manuscript.

"Nothing," he read rapidly and monotonously, "you have made your bed, lie on it, lie on it—"

Josephine dropped into a chair with a moan of anguish.

"They forgot to take the extra blanket off, that's all," explained Jordan hurriedly.

"Will you leave these sordid matters until after we have finished?" demanded the exasperated stage manager. "Get on with the play!"

"Have you nothing to say to me?" asked Georgina for the third time.

"Nothin'," read Jordan.

"You have made your own bed, lie on it, lie on it!"

"And this is the reward of my devotion," said Georgina clasping her hands tragically. "For this I loved you, left my home, my friends, gave up my career! Ah, you can smile! When I see you

standing there with your head held high, looking at me with contempt—I recognize the devil lurking in your eyes. My God! What a fool I've been!"

Helen shuddered.

"I know you'll think I'm a prude," she said, "but there's an awful lot of profanity in this play. Remember, Georgina, children may be taken to see this."

"Oh, shut up, Helen! You can always tone it down for the matinees—go on Georgina."

But Georgina had for the moment given up the attempt to rehearse.

"I can't possibly get any idea how this is going if I am constantly interrupted. And I do so want to know how it will appeal to the managers."

"I'm sure people won't like it," insisted Helen. "At St. Margaret's we always cut the D's and the G's out of our plays."

"Oh, smother St. Margaret's!" said Josephine wildly. "Go on, Georgina."

Georgina took up her script again.

"What—a—fool—I've been—what a fool I've been! But beware, Milford Scarborough! Beware! Ha! You start! So I have touched you on the raw! You need not frown at me! You cannot make me fear you. Heaven will not allow such a man as you to triumph! You smile—this is where you come on, Jo."

"Oh, yes!"

"Lady Violet!" breathed Georgina.

"What are you doing here with my husband?" demanded Josephine sternly.

"Your husband, ha, ha, ha!" sneered Georgina.

Josephine's eyebrows rose.

"Your attitude is strange, Milford Burton—Great God!"

Helen made a disparaging noise.

"You can go out if you don't like it, Helen!" said Josephine furiously, "but for heaven's sake don't snuff!"

"I do think you're overdoing it, really!" said Helen with resignation. "Why not 'Good Gracious' At St. Margaret's—"

"Shut your ears if it shocks you," suggested Josephine and was once more the injured heroine.

"Now then—What is this man to you?"

"He is—my—husband!" said Georgina tragically.

Josephine started back.

"Ah, no! No! No!"

"Four 'no's," murmured the disapproving prompter.

"My dear, don't worry, this is a great play. The bit we've done shows that. Honestly, Helen, don't you think so?"

Helen, thus appealed to, assumed a new importance.

"Do you wish me to be frank?"

"If you're going to be frank,"

"No. It is not true—it is not true—"

"My goodness! It's not true! Milford! Say that it is not true! Speak!"

She dropped her hand on Jordan's shoulder and shook him. "Here! Wake up, Jordan! You're snoring when you ought to be sneering!"

Jordan came to consciousness with a painful grimace.

"Eh, what—oh, yes. 'Let him perish, let him perish!'"

Dramatist and stage manager howled together.

"You don't start perishing anybody until the last act," said Josephine with painful calm. "You've got the wrong page, Jordan, let me show you—there you are—It is false, false, false!"

"Oh, yes, I see. 'It is false, false, false—what about a pipe?' he pleaded."

"You'll get no pipe until we've finished this act," hissed Josephine.

"Now sneer! That's not a sneer that's a sniff! Go on Georgina."

"Milford! You cannot mean that! Ah, no! You are jesting, Milford! You cannot deny your wife—your innocent child! You do! I see it in your eyes!"

"You turn your head away. You laugh! You laugh! Ah, woe—woe! My—heavens, he laughs!"

"(Och!) snored Jordan, his chin dropping to his chest. "Then I am indeed lost! How can you look me in the face? Have you told me the worst, Milford?"

Mrs. Mumble put her head in at the door.

"The milk's gone bad, miss."

Josephine said something. Helen, seeing it coming, closed her ears.

"We'll never keep Jordan awake," said Georgina in despair, after the shocked Mrs. Mumble had hurriedly withdrawn. "He always does this after tea. Really he is terrible. And I did so want to see how it would go."

Josephine slipped her arm about her sister's shoulder and hugged her.

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